2: Kroeber E-5 (1930)1931 NU31 Seri NU31

Society

583 Marriage is monogamous. The wife is bought, in spite of the [595] poverty of the Seri. Santa Blanco paid 150 pesos in property for his wife. Chico Romero, a widower, paid more for his; a widow, "because she had three daughters, and a family with daughters is rich" (in expectation of bride prices).

591 The wife goes to live with the husband. A young couple lives 562 with the young man's parents, perhaps in an annex to the house. "The man commands." Chico was emphatic on this point, and repeated that when his son married he would live with him, not with the girl's relatives. Both he and Santo have step-sons-in-law as well as daughters-in-law living with them, but this is because they are chief and boat-owner respectively; (and the sons-in-law are young).

833 Copulation was said to take place immediately on marriage. McGee's statement of a period of continence being cited as the custom of a foreign tribe, the informant obviously wondered and laughed. [843] Intercourse goes on during pregnancy; but not for some months after birth, for fear of a new pregnancy, which would be injurious to the child. A good man respects his wife at all times and does not constantly pursue her.

144 No half-breeds were seen, and the Seri declare they are free of 164 venereal disease.

551 Nothing could be elicited from the informant as to anything like 14 the group-inherited names of lineages, or clans, of the Yuman tribes.

When a woman dies, the widower may give the children to his dead wife's parents to raise. This is the only item learned that might point to McGee's "matriarchate"; but the informant may have been thinking of particular cases. His son lives with him, though he lost the boy's mother.

582 Cross-cousin marriage is as prohibited as that of parallel cousins. This is in accord with the sibling terminology for all cousins; but in view of the present small number of the tribe, the rule must work difficulty.

A man does not marry his dead wife's sister. Apparently he [587] may not. Nor is there levirate. The informant volunteered the question if marriage with step-daughters was permitted by other peoples. Being told of the Navaho custom, he seemed shocked.

606 Neither husband nor wife looks at or addresses either parent-183 in-law. In the isolated, small-group life of the Seri, this rule can hardly be adhered to with complete rigor, and its conspicuous carrying out was not observed; but then everything in their behavior is casual, informal, and slovenly.

607 The kinship system as recorded contains a note as to a woman not addressing her younger sister's husband by kinship term except

3:Davis & Dawson E-5 (1922-1940) 1945
NUXI 5-ari NU31

342 They are mostly of ocotillo sticks and mesquite branches stood up in the sand, lashed together, and plastered with mud for protection from the wind, but not from the rain (Fig. 22). When the fishing season ends
221 about Holy Week, they all move away to the turtle grounds on Tiburon Island, where they also hunt deer. Then in June and July they go into the desert hills to reap the harvest of cactus fruit, retiring to the lowlands thereafter to harvest the mesquite beans and to await the recurrence of the big fish. In and about Kino they are reasonably well fed and clothed, and were it not for their susceptibility to disease they would be as well-
164 off as many of the Mexicans. Influenza
161 strikes them heavily, however, and pneumonia is common, usually fatal. Their numbers dwindle and their extinction is in sight, yet for a little while these strange people will continue to tread the rocks and thorns of their desert land, a handful of Nature's primitive creatures, through whose veins flows the blood of thoroughbred American aborigines.

[p.268(c)]

Geographical Distribution

The Seri Indians live in two small Indian villages on the coast of the Gulf of California, State of Sonora, Desemboque and Punta Chueca. From there they frequently go to Isla Tiburón in the Gulf of California.

Approximately 35 Seri families live in Desemboque and 16 in Punta Chueca. Only in the first of these two places are there five "yori" (mestizo) families.

Sanitary Problems

The Seris have no defense against certain diseases which, like measles and flu, they acquire in their relations with the "yoris"; these diseases cause many deaths among the Indians. According to the an-

Seri Indian woman of Desemboque, Sonora. *Photo Henriette Yurchenco.*

cient Seri Chico Romero, last Seri Governor, there was a great smallpox epidemic there about 1897 which caused the death of a third of the tribe which was living in Costa Rica, a small ranch on the coast of Sonora.

In 1955 measles appeared among the Seris, with a great number of victims, children and adults; the actions of the rural teacher Leo Sandoval, the Linguistic Eduardo Mosser and of the sanitation authorities of Hermosillo, succeeded in keeping the mortality rate down; nevertheless, the number of deaths reached 5% of the total native population.

7: Marroquin E-5 (1955) 1957 NU31 Seri NU31

In general, the Seris have a healthy appearance; the most frequent complaints are gastro-intestinal and visual defects due to avitaminosis. It is very possible that given the difficult living conditions resulting from the desert environment, a rigorous selective process among the newborn takes place so that only those who possess exceptional physical qualities survive. This explains why the majority of them retain the physical characteristics described by Hardy more than a century ago: "the Indians of Isla Tiburón are tall, healthy and well built".

In spite of attempts at education, the Seris do not practice the elemental rules of hygiene; their way of life, neglecting this aspect, contributes to increase the unhealthy foci which exist in the places where they have established themselves.

Dwellings.—The Seris retain many vestiges of their nomadic life, among them the hut which serves as their living quarters; many of them are simple provisional arrangements for sheltering themselves from wind and sun, and they bear no relationship to the stability and durability of our dwellings. The Seri hut was made to meet the necessities of a nomadic people who had no reason to spend much time nor work on making a dwelling which would only be used for a season (one, two or at the most three months). Nevertheless, some innovations have been introduced in the last 20 years, so that we must distinguish between two types of houses. The primitive model consists of a series of scrub pine arches interwoven with branches from the same shrub almost totally covered by foliage, tortoise shells, *zacate*, etc., with only a small hole in one of its ends as an entrance (this type of hut is the same that McGee saw in 1894 when the Seris still led a nomadic life).

In the new model more resistent woods are used, like *sahueso*, *torote*, etc., and poles, between which is laid a layer mud. The house is rectangular, without windows; with only one entrance, but always larger than the entrance to the brush hut. Other models would have to be added to these two, due to the incorporation and utilization of tents made in the United States which some U. S. tourists or the Society of Friends have given them. The tent is used as permanent living quarters; or sometimes combined with branches to cover the primitive type huts.

Domestic Animals.—The Seris are very fond of domestic animals like the dog, cat, and finally, the chicken. For all practical purposes these animals live together with the family; they rest on the piles of rags and sand which serve the Indians as beds; lick the plates and cooking utensils; dirty the house; increase the household fauna with their fleas and other vermin thus contributing to create and unhealthy atmosphere in the home.

Problems of Intoxication.—Their dealings with the fish buyers, in whose stores are sold beer, mezcal and tequila, has turned them to the consumption of these drinks. The Seri drinks liquor in an uncontrolled

7: Marroquin E-5 (1955) 1957 NU31 Seri NU31

way. Since the preparation of the drinks served to them is not very hygienic, they often produce severe gastro-intestinal upsets and even affect their vision.

Demographic Data

The following chart shows the population distribution by age groups:

SERI POPULATION BY AGE GROUPS AND SEXES
(as of December 31, 1955)

	Men	*Women*
Less than 1 year	4	3
From 1 to 5 years	10	11
From 6 to 10 years	15	12
From 11 to 15 years	15	16
From 16 to 20 years	13	14
From 21 to 25 years	4	1
From 26 to 30 years	7	15
From 31 to 35 years	16	13
From 36 to 40 years	5	2
From 41 to 45 years	2	2
From 46 to 50 years	3	6
From 51 to 55 years	5	5
From 56 to 60 years	—	—
From 61 to 65 years	4	2
From 66 to 70 years	1	2
From 71 to 75 years	—	3
From 76 to 80 years	—	1
From 81 to 85 years	2	—
From 86 to 90 years	—	—
From 91 to 95 years	1	—
Total	107	108

The pyramid of ages formed by the data of the above chart does not present the usual characteristics of a young community in full growth, as is common in the Indian villages; rather it is closer to the old communities, with predomination of the working age groups over the infant and old age groups.

Work

The population able to work can be calculated as that between 11 and 65 years of age; because even though they begin to work very early, the cycle of economic productivity is very long. Calculation of that population gives us the following figures:

121 documentary data and second, also the archaeological data. The subject matter unfortunately [172] is absent from the first. As for the archaeological data, there is none as yet to date for the area [114] except Giffor's unpublished manuscript. Nor have we the kind of ethnography that would be of help—not until ethnographers will pay greater attention to the naturalistic knowledge of the people. Nor can the matter of the Seris' cultural connections be undertaken with the present material with any degree of reliability, simply because no such material exists for the neighboring group.

However, few suggestions outside the limitations and the main object of the present analysis can be made. From the fragmentary data available I shall try to show the change in utilization of animals by the Seris. I think I can also indicate a few points in support or denial of this or that idea of the Seris' cultural connections. I can also suggest the direction of the attitudes toward animals in the Seri culture, in a sphere which normally we assign variously within the domain of religion or world view. I can also indicate some of the major changes in the Seris' exploitation of general environment. All these can be suggested only fragmentarily, as only small bricks toward a generalized structure of our knowledge of the Seri culture. To this extent the present analysis should be helpful to the future student of the Seri culture and to our general understanding of it.

Procedure

114 The field work on which this material is based has been done during the summer of 1953, June-September and again for one week in May, 1955. [164] The second visit took place at a most inopportune [166] time, amidst bad measles, dysentery and a flu epidemic which completely disorganized the tribe and persuaded most of them to flee Desemboque into the coastal desert.

The work was accomplished mostly in Desemboque, the Seris' largest and most permanent settlement after 1940 where most of them lived. Occasional side trips were undertaken later to Hermosillo, Estero Sargente, Campo Vivora, Tiburon and some of the other places mostly with the view of evaluating their ecological nature and for the observation and acquisition of the zoological materials not available in Desemboque. These trips had been undertaken in the company of the Seris who then also doubled up as informants.

124 During the first two weeks of my stay in Des-[126] emboque, I did no interviewing but concentrated on the collections of zoological material, occasionally and informally asking for the name of this or that animal. After two weeks regular interviewing work was commenced, first with an aid of Mr. Leo Sandoval, Mexican, U.S.—educated school teacher, but later on entirely without an interpreter. There are sound reasons for this practice. Direct questioning allows the interrogator to evaluate the replies in their less obvious nuances, the reactions of the informant to the question, his hesitations, uncertainties and the like.

In the event of well-known animals with those colloquial Spanish name everybody, Mexican and

[P.4A]

9:Malkin E-5 (1953-1955)1962 NU31 Seri NU31

II

OUTLINE OF SERI CULTURE

161 At the moment their number should have increased again, after a disastrous epidemic in the 164 spring of 1955.

Biological Background

142 The Seris are somewhat atypical among the peoples of the general area in that they represent a very slender, sinewy, tall type. This is true of both men and women. This physical type in general is apt to be associated with the desert habitat and the Seris answer the requirements very well. As shall be seen, their economy also repre- 433 sents characteristic adaptation to the desert conditions of pre-agricultural people.

Economy

The Seris readily fell into the category of the pre-agricultural hunters and gatherers with one variant, dependence on the produce of the sea, whether marine turtles, fish or littoral invertebrates.

[241] Here the Seri provide another exception for the region. They are the only group that never had any agriculture. McGee has pointed out their lack of agricultural sense and this has also been mentioned by Kroeber and by incidental Mexican visitors. Of late years, some efforts have been made by the Mexican government and the American Friends' Service Committee to persuade them [648] toward agriculture, but to no avail. The Seris [464] occasionally hire out to the surrounding Mexican or American rancher-farmers but grow restless after a few days of cotton picking and retire, with their advanced pay lost to the employer. On the other hand, efforts to teach them related practices, well digging for example, also failed to interest them. To this day they remain much in the original pattern of economy.

262 McGee (1898:214) who had a chance to observe 114 them from the first hand and who also had access to valuable information from the outsiders gives the following figures for their diet:

land game, large and small (incl. stolen stock)	21%
waterfowl and eggs, incl. pelican	13
sea-turtles	25
fish	15
shellfish	10
cactus fruit	9
other plants	6
miscellaneous	2
total animal 84%	marine 65%

Kroeber (1930:20) questions these figures and thinks that shellfish represents greater percentage than McGee indicated. He also thinks the use of turtles had been exaggerated. He figures the dependence on the animal diet as 75% and on marine 60% but he suspects that these figures are too high for a band with ready access to countless cacti and mesquite.

[P.68]

quite possible but I couldn't substantiate the story from contemporary evidence. Perhaps during the height of the shark hunting for the liver oil, the Seris used the oil also for wood polish, although it isn't very clear just what sort of artifact they make would require such treatment. The wooden tools or artifacts among them are in short supply at all times. Finally, the huge horned manta was supposedly hunted also for its hide but just in what circumstances it was not explained. It is the only fish which the Seri ever mentioned as having been put to such use.

Fishing

As already mentioned, fishing nowadays is largely accompanied from flat-bottomed boats with hook and line. The old ways of getting fish by spearing are almost gone for good. Recently, an attempt has been made to teach the Seris siene fishing, but 10 years of these endeavors accomplished only ruination of a number of expensive nets and of much fishing gear and the desertion of the project by the Indians. It may be that their individualistic and almost anarchistic attitudes preclude cooperation, essential in this type of fishing.

The bait is obtained in any one of the three ways: by dynamiting fish in tide pools or along the shore, or by catching small fry with small hook and line, or finally by collecting small fishlets in the tide pools, prying them out from under rocks or simply—and here the Seri boys excel—by shooting them in the tide pools with tiny toy arrows or simply spearing them with a stick. The dynamiting is done with the purchased sticks of dynamite which the Seris obtain in the tiendas. The procedure is often risky and down right dangerous. Some of the Seris have blown themselves up with dynamite. I have seen one of them, who lost both arms and had a jaw broken during a dynamiting trial. He went about with a dirty rag tied up over his head to support the wrecked jaw-bone. He was carried off by measles two years later in the 1955 epidemic.

The Seris' commercial fishing is pretty much controlled and exploited by the two or three Mexican fish traders from Nogales and Hermosillo. These have their tiendas in Desemboque, which at set price sell things to the villagers. They also provide the Indians with the five horse-power motors for fishing trips and pleasure cruises and with the oil and gasoline essential to run these—also at set price. They finally purchase the fish—at a set price—and from the proceeds the Seris purchase goods at the tiendas, completing the cycle. Not all Seris are compelled to work for the Mexicans, and, in fact, they do not always do so. Some families stay away from Desemboque and depend on the sail and oars for propulsion. They come to the village only once every few months to obtain supplies. Even when in the village, the Seris make little effort to fish for more than they wish to get in order to satisfy their immediate needs.

Fishing expeditions usually take place in the morning. Most Seris will set off before daybreak and will return with the catch by 11 a.m. or noon.

[P.33 A]

known remedy. This bug is actually a vector of the Chagas disease. Its repeated bites may cause allergic sensitization. For lack of clinical observation it is impossible to determine the exact nature of its effects, as the Seris describe them.

The remaining two creatures are both beetles. *Calosoma* is thought a nuisance rather than a danger. Its disagreeable habit is spitting out poison through the rear end of the body which may cause headache for a brief while. To this I may readily attest having on more than one occasion be subjected to *Calosoma's* bombardment. However, at worst it is a mere irritant. Finally *Hippomelas*, sometimes confused with the *Steriphanus* and *Dermestes* are supposedly evil smelling but not harmful.

Finally the male *Arenivaga*, considered separate from the female, the Seris claim also bites with the mouth but it is not dangerous.

What is little surprising is that the Seris did not include in their list a few other insects that could have readily found their way into the "dangerous" gallery. The huge water bug *Lептocerus* of course bites, although the Seris claim it does not. An aquatic insect par excellence, it simply never had a chance to prove to them what it can do. The Pentatomid bug *Rhytidolomia* at least may be included among the stinging variety, although it is perfectly harmless. Finally there are various Reduviid bugs, notorious carnivores, which when disturbed and offered an opportunity will sting painfully. But here again, the Seris may not have played enough with them to find out.

On the whole, the Seris are well informed concerning possible dangers from various insects. As a matter of practical application, they do in this regard far better than the Mexicans.[12]

278

[12] The Seris may have used a concoction of insects in arrow poisoning. McGee quotes Hardy who had visited them in 1825 as follows:

> "It is believed that the Ceres Indians have discovered a method of poisoning their arrows and that they do in that way: They kill a cow and take from it its liver. They then collect a number of rattlesnakes, scorpions, centipedes and tarantulas, which they confine in a hole with the liver. The next process is then to beat them with the sticks in order to enrage them, and being thus infuriated, they fasten their fangs and exhaust their venom upon each other and upon the liver. When the whole mass is in high state of corruption, the old women take the arrows and pass the point through it. They are then allowed to dry in the shade and it is said that the wound inflicted by them will prove fatal. Others again say that the poison is obtained from the juice of the yerba de fle'cha (arrow wort)."

[P. 53 B]

000 wear ceremonial feathers as did our western Indians. I saw no skin or
164 cutaneous disease, or evidence of tuberculosis or of trachoma---the curse of our Indians.

142 One boy-child of five years was a handsome child---fat, round,
202 sturdy, with roving great black eyes, large thick lips, a picture of
[241] perfect health. He was almost naked. His hair was done in a pigtail
[857] with a red string braided into it. His face like all the others was dirty, but he waded into the shallow water with a short spear and I saw him catch two crabs with his little harpoon. The water did not bother his face.

415 They had no plates or eating tools, except large deep clam shells,
412 cast up by the sea, which served as cups and dippers. Their long, keen
264 belt knives were used for cutting, carving or skinning, and always the
[257] fingers for eating. They gathered in a circle around an olla of seeds of long grass growing on the sea bottom prepared by winnowing, parching and grinding, and then cooked with turtle oil. Each one dipped his or her fingers into the olla and conveyed them to the mouth without losing a drop, and licked them off with great relish.

231 The dogs eat with the family. There were six or seven half-starved
264 ones. If someone picked up a piece of turtle flipper the dog often took the first lick at it, bit off a piece or licked it before it reached the owner's mouth. The dogs were not punished. They were just slapped to keep them out of the pots.

123 We had a great time that evening in Seriland. The young man played
534 his violin. This consisted of a hollow box cut out of a *palo verde*
[824] tree, and a piece of pine about sixteen inches long; terminating in a
[283] hollow where a single peg was fitted. The one string was twisted deer
[237] sinew, and the bridge was a small round clam shell at the far end. The
[533] bow was a small bent stick and some black horsehair. On the handle was a wad of rosin fastened underneath. By fingering this string a few weak squeaky notes were made, and this was the classical music of the Seris.

Manuel Encina seized his gourd rattle and began chanting. Herrera tapped a tin can and I beat on an inverted basket and the orchestra
535 was in full swing. A young girl, Rosa, dragged out a turtle shell and
123 standing on it began to dance. This dance consisted of stepping up and down quickly with each foot alternately, and this stamping, barefooted, emitted a hollow sound. Every once in a while I let out an
[126] Indian yell which pleased the Seris very much. For two hours they had a real swell time. We took one flashlight of the proceeding.

[342] Each family was in their hut, which afforded very slight shelter
[362] as they were only partially roofed over and the sides were broken
[354] down in places. The huts were all adjoining and each had a little
[361] campfire, which did not give much illumination, so the dancing was in semi-darkness.

(text contineus on p. 163)

War Chief of the Seris

622 765 There is sorrow and mourning on that little known island in the Gulf of California, Tiburon.

[164] During the last few years, many of the Seri tribesmen have succumbed to influenza and pneumonia, and many a night has the weird and melancholy wailing for the dead mingled with the soft lapping of the waters of the Gulf on the shores of that lovely desert isle.

But now a universal grief has overtaken the remnants of a once powerful and warlike tribe---Juan Tomas (*Pik-tom-aohe*, "Very Brave" in his own language)---the old War Chief of the Seris, is no more. He has fought a last and losing battle. For a month, maybe for several months, the women will wail and lament, and around the tribal camp fires, for many a night, the Seris will tell of his exploits and miraculous escapes, as they told Roberto Thomson, their friend and advisor.

[164] The old Chief died on the shores of Kino Bay opposite Alcatraz Island, probably of pneumonia.

There was no soft mattress to lie upon, no pillow to rest his head, and no roof to shelter him from sun or storm. His bed was the sand of the sea shore; his canopy, the blue heavens above, and his [163] requiem, the solemn beating of the surf on the shore. His last words were to his grand-nephews to inherit the *Sierra de las Tinajas*, and he asked the Indians and his *Yori* (Mexican) friends to protect his nephews and the mountains.

622 764 His body was wrapped in an old *serape*, fastened around by rope of native fibre. His grave was dug with paddles from the canoes, four and one-half feet deep in the sand hills near the sea. He was placed in the grave with his head to the north, face up, with the carapace of a sea turtle covering his head. Amid much lamentation and mourning, the grave was partially filled, and then a heavy layer of *cholla* cactus spread over. The grave was then filled and mounded up and covered with *chollas*, *mesquite*, shells, and thorny growths, and also a five-gallon can. The cactus spines were to discourage coyotes.